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ABSTRACT

The report describes the design and results of a Calgary (Canada) program (August 1, 1990 to June 12, 1992) to disseminate information about literacy education needs and services to the local community. It is organized into sections, each addressing a specific program objective. Sections include the following: (1) increasing awareness, particularly among social agencies, businesses, and unions, of the problems of low literacy and encouraging solutions; (2) helping low-literacy adults find appropriate literacy programs; (3) increasing communication among literacy providers and social agencies; (4) helping potential literacy volunteers find appropriate placements; (5) continuing efforts to learn of and address literacy needs in the city; and (6) efficient project administration. The two main project services included outreach to community and industry groups and a telephone hotline for referral to appropriate literacy programs. The project's efforts are described and hotline calls are tabulated. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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Literacy Awareness and Literacy Hotlines: The Final Report of the Calgary Adult Literacy Awareness Project

(August 1, 1990 to June 12, 1992)

by

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June 24, 1992

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Literacy awareness is a good idea, but what does it mean to try to raise awareness, and what works and what does not? A literacy hotline is also a good idea, but we know that most low literate adults who enroll in programs learned about the educational opportunity by word of mouth. So what are the purposes of a literacy hotline, and what are keys to success? From August 1, 1990 to June 12, 1992, the Calgary Adult Literacy Awareness Project attempted to raise literacy awareness and operated a literacy hotline in Calgary, Alberta, an urban area of approximately 650,000 people. The purposes of this final report are to describe what was done, make recommendations to others interested in literacy awareness and hotlines, and, in the process, address the questions asked above.

The Calgary Adult Literacy Awareness Project was started and supervised by the Literacy Action Association of Calgary, a group of literacy workers and social service providers dedicated to fostering innovative literacy initiatives. The National Literacy Secretariat and the Government of Alberta funded the Project for two years. The United Way of Calgary and area housed the Project.

Although the initial proposal called for one full-time person and a half-time support staff, I, as the full-time person, decided to hire another professional instead of a secretary. It is impossible for one person to be simultaneously in the office answering the literacy hotline and out visiting organizations. It is also difficult making good decisions without at least one colleague to bounce ideas off of. To complement my strengths, I hired someone quite different from me: a female, English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, who was a different personality type and an opposite learning style. Then we established an office, ordered some recent literacy publications, and started to work on the Project's three objectives.

Objective 1

To increase awareness--particularly among social agencies, businesses, and unions-- of the problems of low literacy and to encourage solutions.

Considering a staff of one and a half and a total advertising budget of approximately 10,000 dollars a year, we immediately narrowed this objective to focus on social agencies. A local college had recently completed a survey of local businesses and had found little interest in workplace literacy programs. A Literacy Action Association Board member had called several unions and detected limited interest. Consultations with a local union and the Alberta Federation of Labour confirmed that at this time Calgary unions had other priorities.

This does not mean that we ignored unions and business. I acted as a literacy resource person in the Alberta Federation of Labour's Worker Literacy Initiative Project. Together with Metrographics printing shop, I produced a four-page newsletter entitled "Literacy and the Workplace," and distributed 5,000 copies to businesses in the downtown area. I spoke to the Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators over lunch at the Professional Club. The Project also participated in the Prosperity Secretariat's community talks and contributed to the Conference Board of Canada's conference on business and education. As editor of *Literacy Action*, the quarterly newsletter of the Alberta Association for Adult Literacy, I made workplace literacy the feature topic for 1991-92.

However, the principal focus was on social agencies, where chances of success seemed greatest. We made 42 presentations to nearly as many organizations. Each presentation was tailor-made. Before presenting, we asked what the group wanted to know about literacy and what the purpose of the presentation

was. We tried to ascertain the audience's knowledge and beliefs on the subject. We also clarified what situation we would be presenting in and what kind of an evaluation would be appropriate. Presentations varied from staff meeting items in battered women's shelters to keynote addresses at plush hotels.

The Assistant Director distributed evaluation forms at nine presentations. The most common comments were that the presentation was friendly and engaging, and that the information was clear and interesting. People were particularly struck by the extent of the illiteracy problem. As information sessions, the presentations were highly successful. Whether the people retained the information, or changed their interaction with low literate clients, or changed facets of their organizations, we do not know. When we worked with a small number of agencies more intensively, we were able to see changes.

Our other major effort to create awareness in the social service sector was the *Literacy Audit for Social Agencies*, a kit designed to help organizations determine how user-friendly they are for clients who have trouble reading and writing. Five sheets provide information about adult literacy and about how to implement the audit. Six worksheets guide the examination of different facets of the agency. Through 18 months and 12 drafts, we fine-tuned the literacy audit by working with five social agencies and by having colleagues critique the kit. With each of the five agencies, we tried a different way of fostering change, from presenting the audit and letting the organization do what it wanted, to going into an agency as an outside consultant and writing a formal report of the evaluation. We learned that a key to facilitating change is to have senior management and/or the Board involved as early in the process as possible.

We presented draft versions of the literacy audit at the Alberta Association for Adult Literacy annual conference in Lethbridge, Alberta, and at a national United Way of Canada conference in

Victoria, British Columbia. We printed 1,000 copies of the kit, mailed 500 copies to social agencies and literacy groups across Canada, and advertised the other 500 for distribution to those requesting copies.

Something like the *Literacy Audit for Social Agencies* is a good tool for raising awareness and possibly instigating change. However, for it to work, organizations must assume responsibility for the audit and not rely on an external consultant or a solitary employee to implement the audit. The organization needs at least one person to champion the cause, and senior management and/or the Board must endorse the effort early on. Such conditions greatly enhance the chances that the audit will involve many people in the agency and that recommendations from the audit will be implemented. This approach means working on awareness with a small number of committed agencies.

The common notion is that some kind of awareness activity will somehow translate into something good for adult literacy. But for awareness campaigns to work, they must have specific objectives, a model for how change will occur, and a plan of action. This is much more difficult than it sounds. The following advice helps focus thinking: Awareness campaigns should either be big or small but not middling. Big campaigns might aim to change public attitudes in the same way that Subaru has recently tried, through spending millions of dollars, to change the car-buyers' conception of Subarus. Major commercial ad campaigns provide a good model, and ad executives should be major players in big awareness efforts. Small campaigns might aim to change behaviors in, say, an organization or a community service club. Organizational development models and staff development models are useful. So are the adult education skills common among literacy professionals.

In addition to the tailor-made presentations and the focused work with the *Literacy Audit*, we conducted a few other awareness activities.

*I sat on the advisory board for the production of the Calgary Public Library's training video, *Reaching Out: Communicating with New Canadians and Adult Learners*. Although this took little time, my suggestion for structuring the video as an educational production for librarians shaped the final product, and the video producer said the *Literacy Audit for Social Agencies* was the most helpful document she read in preparing the video.

* Every three months we distributed our Quarterly Report or newsletter to nearly 200 people--social agency employees, literacy workers, and politicians.

*I helped the United Way of Calgary New Initiatives community needs assessment by organizing a meeting with low literate adults and another meeting with a cross section of Adult Basic Education (ABE) and ESL teachers. Subsequently, a local literacy program received New Initiatives funding.

*The Project participated in the Federal Government's Prosperity Consultations about education and the economy. I submitted a written response to the Prosperity Secretariat's discussion paper *Learning Well... Living Well*. The Project then encouraged literacy workers to attend the two Prosperity Secretariat public meetings held in Calgary. We represented the adult literacy and ESL communities at the community consultations, and the Project's Assistant Director was invited to the final round of consultations, held in Vancouver, and again spoke on behalf of low literate adults and speakers of English as another language.

*The Project received considerable coverage in the print media. Usually we initiated it. For example, we issued our study of ABE and ESL enrolments as a press release, "Low literate adults

face shortage of programs." The *Calgary Herald* announced it as a feature on page 1, and then, on the first page of Section B, presented the report in a more accessible, journalistic style than we had written it. Other times, reporters called us looking for opinions, confirmation, or facts and figures. Seven articles appeared in the two major papers, numerous community newspapers printed our press releases verbatim, and local and national newsletters ran stories on our literacy awareness project.

*The Project's advertising campaign, aimed primarily at low literate adults, impacted a wide range of citizens and thus contributed to keeping the adult literacy issue in the public eye. Details on this campaign and general public awareness are included under the next objective.

Objective 2

To help low literate adults find appropriate literacy programs.

To meet the objective of helping low literate adults find suitable literacy programs, we started and ran a literacy hotline. We defined "low literate adult" broadly as anyone 18 years of age or older who was reading, writing, or speaking English below a Grade 12 level. We made a list of the ABE and ESL programs in Calgary and the surrounding area, visited more than two dozen of them, and completed descriptions of all programs. We used data collection sheets based on the comprehensive program description forms created by the National Adult Literacy Database. We put the one-page descriptions of the programs in alphabetical order in a referral book, and created a table of contents which grouped the four dozen programs into ABE full-time or part-time and ESL full-time or part-time. We updated the referral book every trimester--September, January, and March.

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We advertised our service by various means:
--media releases announcing the Project's start, and nine subsequent radio interviews
--posters designed with the help of a graphic artist and five ABE students
--inside horizontal cards and posters in C-Trains and city buses
--handbills, 81/2" x 3 2/3", placed in social service agency display racks and the branches of the Calgary Public Library
--business cards advertising the Literacy Hot Line
--ESL pamphlets in 6 languages
--professionals' pamphlets describing the Project
--inserts in 10,000 BASS ticket envelopes
--ads in the *Calgary Herald*
--three radio commercials we made featuring ABE students
--ABC Canada's radio public service announcement with our number tagged
--ABC Canada's television public service announcements with our number tagged
--speeches to professionals
--visits to literacy classes while we were creating the referral book and while training volunteers
--press coverage
--pens imprinted with the Literacy Hot Line number
--the Metrographics newsletter on workplace literacy
--hotline information pasted on *Taking Down the Wall of Words, Vol. 1* and *Vol. 2*, and distributed.

We staffed the Literacy Hot Line from 8:30 to 4:30 Monday to Friday and used an answering machine at other times. With 17 of the 21 months of the project completed, I had answered 54% of the calls, the Assistant Director 24%, volunteers 15%, and the part-time secretary/hotline counsellor 7%. Here is a tabulation of the calls received on the Literacy Hot Line.

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Literacy Hot Line Calls

	1990 Months				*1991 Months*						
Callers	8/9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Low Lit. Adults-ABE	1	4	4	25	10	4	30	25	45	21	11
Low Lit. Adults-ESL	4	3	0	5	2	7	27	22	20	21	20
Person on behalf of-ABE	1	2	5	11	4	8	10	26	10	10	10
Person on behalf of-ESL	3	5	2	2	3	5	7	15	11	10	6
Volunteer/Job Seeker	5	2	2	3	16	3	10	23	24	26	27
General Information	0	11	5	13	10	12	15	12	12	9	6
Total Calls	14	27	18	59	45	39	99	123	122	97	80

	1991 Months				*1992 Months*						
Callers	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Low Lit. Adults-ABE	10	17	28	31	33	17	27	36	14	20	413
Low Lit. Adults-ESL	19	16	17	26	18	19	11	18	9	7	291
Person on behalf-ABE	5	11	16	13	6	11	16	23	12	9	219
Person on behalf of-ESL	15	5	8	16	4	6	8	8	3	2	144
Volunteer/Job Seeker	6	31	26	26	17	34	27	17	9	15	349
General Information	9	11	18	15	16	11	13	19	10	10	237
Total Calls	64	91	113	127	94	98	102	121	57	63	1653

Of the 1067 calls received from low literate adults or people calling on their behalf, 40% were ESL and 60% were ABE. The number of calls received is positively correlated with major advertising efforts. The March-June 1991 campaign caused the average number of calls to triple from start-up numbers. The October-December 1991 campaign again saw the numbers jump, although using the horizontal cards on public transportation a second time was not as dramatically successful as the spring 1991 showing. The February-March 1992 campaign based on radio and newspaper ads also increased calls. When we stopped

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all formal advertising, the number of calls plummeted from 121 in March to 57 in April, 1992.

The campaign strategies which generated the most calls on the hotline were the horizontal cards and posters on buses and C-Trains (24%), networking with professionals (21%), and newspaper ads (17%).

From the start, we maintained the same purposes for the hotline, but as we answered calls, the purposes became clearer and firmer. A literacy hotline should be primarily for low literate adults. Its principal purpose should be to match these potential students with the most appropriate courses, programs, or other educational opportunities. The assumption is that a low literate adult who enrolls in the most suitable program is more likely to be happy, more likely to succeed, and less likely to drop out. A second purpose should be to combat "creaming." The small percentage of low literate adults who are actually enrolled in literacy programs tend to be "the cream of the crop," those are amenable to going"back to school" and who, in one sense, need the upgrading least. Advertising should aim to recruit those who normally would not sign up for a program, and the hotline conversation should encourage them to proceed and give them guidance on how to get into a program.

A hotline should also be for potential literacy volunteers. They too need information and can benefit from being matched with an appropriate volunteer opportunity. In addition, a hotline should dispense literacy information to the public in general, for misconceptions abound.

A hotline for low literate adults can be judged on a variety of levels:

1. Number of calls
2. Quality of the referrals
3. Quality of interaction with callers
4. Number of callers who call programs
5. Number of callers who get into literacy programs

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6. Number of callers who get into literacy programs and are different from the typical ABE or ESL student
7. Number of callers who stay in programs longer and learn better.

The number of calls on the Literacy Hot Line is highly satisfactory. The 1,067 calls from low literate adults represents twice the rate of calls received by the comparable operation in Canada, the Ottawa-Carleton hotline. The New York state literacy hotline received 2,766 calls in one year.

The quality of referrals was superb. In the first year, the Project hired a person who knew both the ABE and the ESL programs in the city, and asked her to compare the case history data with the program referral(s) on each Hot Line Data Collection Form. She concluded that "the phone call records reveal a high degree of sensitivity to callers' needs and appropriate referrals on the basis of those needs." She also noted that "firsthand knowledge of the 'atmosphere,' bureaucracy, and amenities provided (e.g., babysitting) at individual programmes enabled the staff to make informed referrals." This record continued through the second year even though we then had volunteers and a secretary/counsellor helping to answer the hotline.

The quality of interaction with callers was high. This is a completely subjective judgement. It is also the accomplishment I am most proud of. So many callers said something such as this: "This is the sixth place I've called, and I just kept getting the brush off and told to phone somebody else. No one would even listen to me long enough to find out what I really wanted. You have been really helpful. This looks good! I've got all the information. And I got some other things straightened around, so I think I'm on the right track now. What was your name again? Thanks." We listened. We gave non-bureaucratic answers--that is, we not only gave the required information, but we contextualized it. We talked straight. Both the low literate adults about to take the big step "back to school" and

the potential volunteers about to put their time, energy, and egos on the line tutoring appreciated the candour.

Because we decided that hotline calls would be anonymous, we conducted no systematic follow-up on callers. In contrast, the British Columbia Contact Centre asks people if they would mind a follow-up call. This seems a good approach and likely to work, for by the end of a conversation, most callers feel comfortable talking and pleased with the help they have received. Although we were unable to follow up on callers, we received some information on our efforts to recruit non-traditional ABE and ESL students. Three programs volunteered that the hotline and the recession were responsible for sending them a wider variety of students than normally enrolled in their courses.

Deciding whether or not to use volunteers to answer the hotline requires careful thought. First, volunteers interested in answering the hotline are rare. Almost all of the 349 callers wanting to volunteer in the literacy field preferred to tutor. Furthermore, volunteers capable of learning enough about literacy, programs, and telephone counselling to be able to do a good job are rare. In the Project's second year, five selected volunteers answered the hotline. Their extensive training included visits to a dozen programs and incorporated working with students in some of the classes. Although the volunteers answered the hotline well, they eventually found other aspects of the Project more interesting, and got involved in needs assessments, advertising, and proposal preparation. The effort spent recruiting, training, supervising, and rewarding volunteers would probably not have been worthwhile if the volunteers had only answered the telephone. But they became involved in other facets of the Project, and they brought their unique, interesting personalities to a small operation.

Another decision is whether to make the referral book available. We produced ours for internal use only because the Alberta Literacy Inventory Project had already compiled a

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provincial referral book, we did not have the staff to produce and maintain a polished product, we wanted more extensive information than most referral book descriptions contain, we did not want to be forced into making all descriptions exactly the same in amount of detail, and we thought that the future of the Project might hinge on the number of calls received. If a referral book is produced for distribution, it should be in a form that can be easily updated. Then the book and a subscription to updates can be sold to interested parties.

Objective 3 (Year 1)

To increase communication among literacy providers and social agencies.

An informal needs assessment of literacy workers and social service providers revealed that only about 60% were interested in the proposed networking, and then only if it was informal. Consequently, we made the third objective less important than the other two, and we organized the following informal networking activities.

*Representatives from 15 organizations met at the Calgary John Howard Society to discuss literacy problems in social agencies.

*The Project and the Calgary Urban Project Society conducted a preliminary needs assessment into a literacy program for street people.

*The Assistant Director attended and twice chaired bi-monthly meetings of the Calgary interagency immigrant services network. These meetings bring together ESL providers and social agencies dealing with immigrants.

*The major networking activity was a one-day workshop which the Project and Calgary Health Services organized. Twenty literacy professionals and twenty health professionals explored

the connections between literacy and health. Literacy people worked in pairs with health care providers to develop health education materials which were more accessible to low literate adults. This carefully planned event was extremely successful.

Objective 3 (Year 2)

To help potential literacy volunteers find appropriate placements.

Although the Project stayed close to its original goals, the third objective was changed for the second year. The informal needs assessment had discovered considerable ambivalence about increased networking. Because we received close to 142 calls during the first 12 months of the Project from people wanting to be volunteer tutors, we decided that we should redirect our efforts into doing a more systematic job of referring volunteers. We added a volunteer section to the referral book, and we kept track of what programs urgently needed tutors. The Calgary John Howard Society and the Calgary Catholic Board's Intermediate Literacy Program reported receiving a large portion of their volunteers via the Literacy Hot Line. In the second year (10 months) of the Project, we referred approximately 202 volunteers to programs.

At first thought, it might seem that highly educated volunteers need little assistance compared to low literate adults. However, many potential volunteers had no idea what options were available or what tutoring involved. Thus we discussed several questions with them:

Do you want to tutor or volunteer in some other capacity?
Should you tutor ABE or ESL?
Do you want to work in a classroom or tutor one-to-one in the community?
What is a convenient time and a convenient location?
Do you want to begin immediately or are you willing to wait?

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Callers frequently identified themselves as incompetent to tutor, and they asked about training programs, particularly how extensive the programs were. Although every tutor training program in the city is different, they are all approximately the same in their depth. There may be a significant number of potential volunteers who value training so highly that they would choose a literacy program primarily because of its extensive training for volunteers.

Our purpose was not to recruit large numbers of volunteer tutors but rather to help potential volunteers find appropriate placements. The external evaluator found no inappropriate recommendations. Volunteers who are working in the most appropriate programs are most likely to be please with tutoring and thus more likely to do good jobs for the coordinators and, most importantly, for the students.

Another Objective

To keep our eyes open for literacy needs in the city.

Although this was not one of the objectives in the original proposal, the funders asked us to "keep [our] eyes open for literacy needs" in Calgary. We identified the following needs, and took action to meet them.

Low literate adults face shortage of programs

There is a shortage of adult literacy programs to which we can refer callers. We conducted an enrolment survey of all ABE, ASE (Adult Secondary Education), and ESL programs in the city. This was the first time such statistics had been compiled. We then used the latest Statistics Canada data to calculate the need for more literacy programs. Approximately 2.8% of adults who could have used academic upgrading programs were enrolled.

All of the programs except three expensive private business operations were full and had waiting lists (if they kept waiting lists any longer). Of course, many adults who could use help with reading and writing do not want it at the moment. Still, only 27% of adults interested in improving their reading and writing were enrolled in Calgary. Two organizations have told us that they are using our study as the basis for funding proposals.

ESL/Literacy Discussion Group

There is little communication between ESL instructors and literacy workers, even though they have more common than unique concerns. Consequently, I organized the ESL/Literacy Discussion Group. It met occasional Thursday's at 4:30 pm. The first year it focused in a fairly structured manner on an agenda of issues common to both groups. This was so useful that the Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language and the Alberta Association for Adult Literacy began sharing information at the provincial level.

The discussion group began the second year in a less structured manner by inviting public relations and media people to discuss "What is the media coverage of literacy and ESL, what should it be, and how do we change it?" The discussions were enlightening, but the group dwindled and soon disbanded, with people saying that they were too busy taking care of business to discuss issues.

Intermediate Literacy Program

Although AVC-Calgary offered a basic literacy program open to the community and featuring the flexibility and individual attention of one-to-one tutoring, no similar program existed for the intermediate level. The Project conducted a systematic needs assessment, asked the Calgary Further Education Council to approve a letter of intent to start an intermediate literacy program, and then asked four educational institutions whether

they would care to submit the formal proposal. The Calgary Catholic Board's Intermediate Literacy Program received an initial six months' funding from Alberta Advanced Education, Community Programs Branch, and has recently been funded for 1992-93.

Something Special for Seniors

Despite the high incidence of reading and writing problems among senior citizens, Calgary has no ABE program especial for seniors. The Assistant Director and a practicum student met with 12 seniors groups to increase awareness about the problems of low literacy and to propose a project with seniors tutoring seniors. The seniors community supported the idea strongly. The Project submitted a proposal to Health and Welfare, and the chances are reasonable of starting a literacy/independence program for seniors in the fall of 1992.

Plain Language Instructional Centre

Our work with social agencies revealed a need for, and an interest in, plain language. A Project volunteer and I are preparing a proposal for the Literacy Action Association for a Plain Language Instructional Centre which would teach employees in several organizations to write plain English. This assistance would be on a subsidized fee-for-service basis. The long-term intent is to demonstrate to cash-strapped social agencies the benefits of investing even more resources in plain language.

Tutors' Changing Conceptions of Literacy

There is a need for the public to move beyond awareness of the illiteracy problem to understanding. But how? Possibly if highly literate citizens tutored and got to know low literate citizens, the well-educated would become better educated about the who, what, and why of low literacy. Thus the Project began research to answer "Do volunteer tutors change their

conceptions of literacy, and why or why not?" This research is also a needs assessment to see whether tutor training might need to include more than teaching techniques.

Implicit Objective

To administer the Project efficiently.

An unstated objective was to administer the Project efficiently. This involved activities such as the following:
--Set up and run the office.
--Interview, hire, and supervise staff.
--Recruit, train, and supervise volunteers and practicum students.
--Work with the Board: prepare for and attend meetings, prepare minutes, circulate information, and consult with Board members.
--Liaise with the United Way of Calgary, which housed the Project.
--Budget.
--Maximize limited advertising money.
--Acquire extra funds:
-Calgary Further Education Council
-United Way of Canada
-TransCanada Pipeline
-Alberta Romance Writers Association
-Free advertising from Hook Outdoor Advertising, the *Calgary Herald* and nearly every radio station in the city.

Non-Instructional Literacy Centre

As the Project became well known, it became what some US states call a non-instructional literacy centre. "The Project does everything but teach," we would sometimes explain. A newspaper reporter in the midst of a feature article phones for an explanation of the Statistics Canada literacy figures. An ABE teacher moving from Edmonton drops by to discuss

employment prospects in Calgary. A U of C student asks to use our reference materials. The United Way barrier analysis consultant wants some documents rewritten to demonstrate the effect plain language can make. A person conducting a community needs assessment for the mentally handicapped asks about incorporating literacy issues. Mark Vale, Director of the Plain Language Centre in Toronto, needs someone to organize meetings for him with Calgary ABE and ESL students. The Prosperity Secretariat is holding community consultations on education and economic competitiveness, and we attend to represent adult literacy professionals and students.

Although it is difficult to measure the impact, we believe that having a literacy centre people can turn to demonstrates that adult literacy is an important, ongoing, and accessible concern.